

Having a New Relationship to Your Obsessions: Welcome to the Guest House

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In my previous blog on OCD, [Overcoming Your Obsessive Compulsive Disorder: Accepting and tolerating your obsessive thoughts](#), I suggested that you might think of allowing room for these bothersome and intrusive thoughts. You have been telling yourself that you have to get rid of these thoughts, so you yell "STOP THINKING THIS!" or you neutralize (perhaps you wash your hands or say, "No, I don't believe that").

You are continually trying to get rid of these thoughts.

One technique that can be helpful is to make friends with the thought. There's a wonderful poem by the 13th century Sufi poet called "Rumi". It's about the *Guest House*.



Imagine that your mind is a house in the woods, you are all alone and there is a guest that shows up uninvited. In the past you have been irritable with guests, [angry](#) that anyone would disturb your well-earned solitude. You have yelled at visitors to "GO AWAY" so that you can be alone. But visitors seem to pass on the road where you live. They ignore your no-trespassing sign.

One day this visitor knocks on the door. You don't know him. But you decide that rather than being angry, rather than push him away and pull the shades on the window, you have decided to show your hospitality.

Here are some lines from the Guest House:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

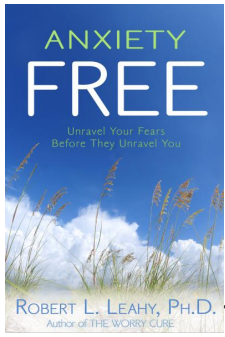
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

And this time you let him in. He is a [lonely](#) visitor, only wants to stay for a while. Give him some tea, ask him to relax. Listen to his story. You do not have to obey him or fear him. Like you, he has been alone. Let him be with you for a moment and then he will leave.

Your intrusive thoughts are like this. They only want your company for a short time. When you hear an intrusive obsession do not fear it, do not run away, do not shut the door. Simply say to your thought, "Ah, you are back again. Welcome. Sit for a while and rest. I have my other things to do, but I know that you need to come in out of the cold".

As the thought chatters away, let it have some space. It's a big enough world. Room for all of us. Observe him, if you can, listening in the background as he repeats what you have heard many times before. He is afraid. But you can see that he is only a lonely soul lost in the woods and he has found some warmth, some [friendship](#) from you, some moment of kindness.

You are less angry, less afraid. The thought, your visitor, is sitting in the corner relaxing, [happy](#) to chat away about nothing in particular. Take some joy in the fact that he has a place to sit on his journey because he has a long way to travel and you have provided some kindness and hospitality for a brief moment in time. A brief moment in an infinite universe.



To learn more about OCD and other anxiety disorders see my book, [Anxiety Free: Unravel Your Fears Before they Unravel You](#).

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